Active Ageing And Third Sector Organizations: A Quantitative Study In Italy

Boccacin, Lucia, Universitat Cattolica del S. Cuore; Rossi, Giovanna, Universita Cattolica del S. Cuore; Bramanti, Donatella, Università Cattolica of Milan

The paper aims to explore the subjective, intersubjective and collective opportunities increasingly afforded by active ageing, which have grown in response to the prolonging of the period of “old age”.

The term active ageing emphasizes the potential (resources) present in the over-sixty-five population. The ever-higher levels of social and cultural dynamism maintained by individuals as they age are concrete demonstrations of how, when interpersonal relationships and social action are maintained into advanced age, so too is personal well-being (Boccacin, Bramanti 2012).

As amply evidenced by recent sociological reflection as well as by specific initiatives sponsored by the European Union (European Year For Active Ageing 2012), the number of volunteer and pro-social activities offered by the elderly for other elderly persons and persons belonging to different generations has increased markedly over the past decade.

The extent of activity, therefore, is now seen as the most effective way to prevent psychological and-physical decline in both the individual who will, in this way, be able to maintain a certain quality of life and in society as a whole (Börsch-Supan A. et al. 2008).

There is a strong connection between agency, activity and well-being (both personal and intersubjective) and the qualities of meaning that occur in primary, secondary and associative relationships. In particular, the intergenerational factor enables members of different generations to fulfil their full potential in their physical, social and mental well-being, and to maintain a healthy and active social life (Dykstra 2010).

Moreover, it is essential to define what opportunities the term active ageing encompasses in regards to acting out (practice) and reflectivity (cultural orientations, ideals and values) (Archer 2003).

The predisposition toward active ageing takes on different modes of expression: it can be a time devoted to the satisfaction one’s own needs, to the needs of others, or to a combination of the two.

The first is seen in those oriented toward expressiveness and the pursuit of their personal autonomy. The latter is related to social and pro-social propensity of the elderly - covering primary and external networks, as well as those of third parties. This article will present data obtained from a study conducted in Italy on a sample of active elderly persons (ranging from 65 to 74 years of age) and engaged in pro-social activities within the context of voluntary and third sector organizations. The concept of activity related to the social role that the elderly can play through participation in such third sector associations will also be explained (Boccacin 2005).

In providing aid to others, these active elderly create a solid support network for themselves. This, in turn, contributes to their own well-being.
on a regular basis stimulates the activation of behavioral, material, interpersonal and communicative resources. Within the group, the elderly person becomes a member of a community in which he or she plays a special role. Within the association the elderly volunteer/person can take on or reinforce a specific social identity; he or she rediscovers the value of dialogue and is able to satisfy/fulfil his or her need for expression, socialization and, in some cases, solidarity (De St. Aubin, Mc. Adams, Kim 2004).

In short, three elements characterize the social participation of older people who are active in third sector organizations.

- The first element concerns the reinforcement of basic principles such as participation and self-fulfilment of the elderly (Hank, Buber 2009). Indeed, by participating in these organizations, the active elderly develop explicit social skills, know-how and their own personal interests.

- A second element, closely related to the first, concerns the process of consolidation of the social identity of active seniors who, through working with organized associations, achieve this consolidation at both the individual and the intersubjective levels (Lüscher 2000).

- The third element refers to the multi-faceted process of the construction of a social identity, which is achieved through active participation in organized associations (Rossi, Bramanti 2006). In other words, those associations promoted by the elderly are configured as multi-purpose entities, and are capable of interacting on various levels, from the individual ones to the local, national, European and international level (Anheier, Rossi, Boccacin 2008).